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ABSTRACT

The research compares two open education programs in New York City (one in a private school, one a public school) from 1970 to 1976. Both programs stressed decentralization of the classroom into interest areas, individually created learning materials, and participation by children in decisions regarding use of time and space. The purpose of the study was to determine what conditions in structure and attitude are required for open education programs. The research involved classroom observation to determine to what degree open education goals were being fulfilled. Research also entailed extensive interviews with teachers, parents, children, and the administration to determine attitudes, values, and roles in the open education environment. Findings indicated that the program in the public schools diminished in status and was less popular in 1976 than in 1970. Reasons for decline included diminished support among adults, lack of funding, inadequate teacher background, a traditional school environment, and negative teacher attitudes toward innovation. In the private school, on the other hand, the open education program prospered during the period under study due to a high degree of acceptance of open education goals among parents, teachers, and students; adequate financing; a non-bureaucratic structure; familiarity among teachers with the literature of primitive socialization and open education methods: and an environment conducive to decentralized activities. It is concluded that open education programs will succeed if teachers are well-trained in open education methods and if there is adequate funding, cooperation among parents, teachers, and students, and a decentralized physical environment. (DB)

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CHILD SOCIALIZATION AND EDUCATION: INNOVATIVE OPEN EDUCATION--ITS GOALS AND VALUES AND THEIR REFLECTION IN PRIMITIVE CHILD SOCIALIZATION

By

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Child Socialization and Education: Innovative Open Education-- Its Goals and Values and Their Reflection in Primitive Child Socialization

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This paper is about educational innovation. It is a comparison based on field experience in two open education programs in New York City. Both experiments were the result of parents' and teachers' organized efforts to create the programs. Both innovations were begun during the 1960's in a climate of increasing political action in New York City as well as in the rest of the nation. The action was directed toward various institutions but none so much as the city school system. Intense strikes and boycotts in 1968 resulted in the decentralization of the New York City School Board. There was a strong feeling among people that they could successfully "fight city hall" and that they could control their own lives if they organized on a community basis. "The schools belonged to the people."

At the same time, the intellectual discussion of education had grown in fervor and writers such as Kohl, Kozol, Featherstone and Neill were discussed in study groups and in local and national media. Films of the British Infant System were circulating.

Furthermore, the New York City school system had discussed implementing innovations and had even built one round school building in the Bronx. Its programs never materialized, however.

Within this socio-political climate, the two programs began, one in the early 1960's and the other in the late 1960's. The former is a private school, the latter, a program within a public school. Eighty to one-hundred children attend each program.

The data for the study is the result of participation, observation and interview at both schools periodically for over six years from 1970-1976 and intensively for over a year within that period. Friends and relatives attend and/or teach at both schools. My apartment was next door to the public school for a year and a half so that total involvement in the neighborhood was a simple matter.

My questions upon entering the schools were: what was open education and did it work? It was difficult at first to define open education except that in many ways it was the opposite of contemporary schooling. For example, it was non-authoritarian. But the positive descriptive word, "free" that came into popular usage presented a lot of problems: it was ambiguous, abstract and full of emotional connotations to people. Still the question of how to define open education exactly continued to be fascinating. There were aspects of it that seemed to reflect primitive socialization. The idea of comparing it to primitive modes seemed to promise some illumination.

Therefore, the analysis and comparison of the two open education programs are discussed with a view toward primitive socialization including the problem of socialization and education.

In order to analyze the field situations, the question of what was open education took the temporary form of what were the goals of open education. The goals listed below are my abstractions of the literature on open education and of parent and teacher discussions at both sites. These goals are a composite summary of my own and nowhere are they spelled out in this fashion in the literature. I have organized my data from the two schools in terms of these goals so as to assure comparability of sites, and as a way to discuss to what degree each goal was fulfilled or not fulfilled at each school. The goals are as follows:

(1) decentralization of the classroom into interest areas in order to eliminate the authoritarian and rigid physical atmosphere. This is to allow the free exploration and experiential learning of the children as they follow their own curiosity from one concrete material to another; (2) making the environment rich in concrete materials. This emphasizes the real, relevant and existential rather than abstract level of learning; (3) allowing the children to freely explore the areas of the room and the materials in it to develop independent decision-making ability toward the use of time and space within a framework of responsibility to others and to the group as a whole; (4) allowing the teacher and her helpers to work with individual children or with small groups. This emphasizes personalization, individuation and affectivity in the learning process as the teacher participates in one-to-one relationships with first one child and then another or leads a small group toward development of a skill in an intimate learning situation. (5) children are mixed in terms of age and ethnicity. The group stays together, ideally, throughout the elementary years and learns to depend upon each other as classmates. They sometimes help or teach each other since they are individuals of varying abilities and capacities. Cooperation within the group is learned and each child is important as an individual rather than for his or her ability to compete successfully against all the others. (6) flexibility in the curriculum and in the use of time and space. This suggests the integral nature of life and learning which are ongoing processes not to be separated into strict and therefore uncreative time and space zones. (7) interpenetration of subject and skills and interrelatedness of all subject matter. This emphasizes the holistic nature of learning. Integrated material is more meaningful than separate, unrelated subjects. (8) emphasis on individually created materials over ready made educational materials allowing skill learning and expressiveness as the rightful endeavor of all members of the group.

Each category is interconnected to and sometimes generative of other categories. The categories are separated here for the purpose of analysis of the schooling process. In reality, they cannot be separated. Nor do these categories as a totality define open education goals. They are, rather, a framework within which to inspect the system and evaluate the programs.

The analysis of the schools began with an examination of each goal to see to what degree each goal was fulfilled and to what degree contradictions prevented their total fulfillment. So, for example, the first goal is concerned with the decentralization of the classroom for the purpose of breaking down traditional authoritarian relationships. The public school had decentralized four of its rooms and used the corridor in between for various activities. However, in contradiction to this physical decentralization, a teacher who had indeed set her desk in a corner, maintained a strong authority over the details of activity in the room. On the other hand, the private school which had also decentralized the traditional physical layout likewise followed through in decision-making and other areas of school life. There were no obvious contradictions on this goal in the private school.

By analyzing each goal and summing up these results, it was abvious that there were many contradictions at the public school. On the other hand, there were few contradictions at the private school.

The next part of the analysis was an examination of attitude, values and roles of teachers, parents, children and administration. So, for example, material regarding teachers included a variety of observations from and about teachers: fear of growing stale, lack of self confidence in goal pursuits, frustration in working conditions, misunderstanding of goals, or slipping back into well worn gears of traditional pedagogical method. The classroom process at the public school revealed contradictions in the attitudes of the teachers, and resistence to open education, due perhaps to their own socialization or personal needs. Their training had been for traditional education, not open education. Their short course training at the beginning of the open education program was not sufficient without coordination, guidance, monitoring and refreshment. The assistant principal, whose job it is to oversee teachers, has no knowledge or training in open education. The teacher may use the open education classroom structure to teach basically the same way she has in traditional classrooms with a few changes that suit her style and personality. Even a teacher fully intending to become an effective open education teacher may find it difficult to actualize her desires under these conditions and therefore revert to a familiar method. There is no broad base support for open education: most institutions of teacher culture reflect traditional educational theory and method; the teachers' union doesn't back open education, requirements for licensing don't include knowledge of open education; most teachers' colleges don't teach open education; and most teachers don't know the area.

At the private school, the situation was different. The teachers are an interdependent unit who work together in constant communication in an informal manner. Some have been trained in open education or the British Infant System. When teachers leave, they sometimes teach in open schools elsewhere. Former teachers often return to visit, to help or to teach part-time. Open education is part of their life style and life choices. Networks of similarly minded friends constantly reinforce their awareness.

The analysis of the schools included similar discussions of parents, children and administration, each a coordinate of the overall picture. Then, an interpretation of the atmosphere within the schools was related to the socioeconomic conditions outside the schools. Conclusions for each school were then drawn. A short summary of this analysis follows.

First, the public school, located in an area of New York City that is approximately one-third black, one-third white, and one-third Puerto-Rican. The parent-teacher group behind the open education experiment had hoped to solve problems of tracking, attitudes toward the poor, racism, authoritarianism, lack of skill learning, and categorization of children.

A POPULAR FRONT OF CHANGE

The first days of the program were exciting and visitors wore a constant path to the door to see the "open corridor" in action. There were many hands to help, enthusiasm, ideas, and funding. Initial direction from an authority on open education was available to all teachers. Simultaneously, the Black Parents Association and the Puerto Rican Parents Association increased their activities--purchasing books for the library, erecting displays in the halls, and presenting culture festivals and dramas at the school. Funds were available to pay leaders of these groups. The entire school was aware that changes were going on in many areas, that the open education, the Black Parents and Puerto Rican Parents Associations, the discussions at the school board (now decentralized) and parent-teacher association meetings were all part of a positive front to solve schooling problems. Within the school there were certain parents and teachers who were especially behind the open education while some were negative and others had a wait-and-see attitude. Still the school as a whole was conscious of what the experiment could mean and of what they could accomplish as a community. For example, following a tragic accident in a neighborhood welfare hotel, the school walked many miles downtown together carrying the coffin of the child killed in the accident to protest the conditions that led to the tragedy.

From 1970 to 1976 certain changes occurred: (1) financial crisis meant cut backs--teachers were moved out who had been there a long time and new ones were fired. Some teachers became irritated with the conditions and the struggle and left for so-called greener pastures such as Detroit and Cleveland. Some of these teachers had considered themselves radicals and had supported the open education program. Because of that situation the teachers who remained on the staff tended to be conservative.

(2) The attitude of the teachers changes over the years. They became frightened for their jobs and dug in their heels. Their attitude in 1976 was generally one aimed at survival which translated into reading score achievement for the children. That is, they intended to teach the children to read and anything else was a frivolous discussion.

(3)The principal: he had appeared to back the program in the beginning but seemed in retrospect to have been a diplomat or a cameleon, depending on who you talked to. He was trying to hold together a sinking ship. That is, by 1976, one hour of class was eliminated from the children's day due to the financial pinch. At that point, the children and parents boycotted the school and took over the principal's office, leaving him to operate from a card table in the hall. The atmosphere of the school was tense and paranoid unlike the "togetherness" days of the 60's and early 70's.

(4)Parents became disgruntled with what was happening to their children--increased violence, drugs and resistance to learning. They placed the blame variously on the school, the financial crisis, the neighborhood changing, the teachers changing, or on the open education program's problems. A Puerto Rican woman of little means, moved several blocks,at great expense,to get into the next school district. Parents no longer volunteered to help the teachers at the same time that funds were cut that had provided para-professional assistance. The adult-child ratio went down from about 1-5 to 1-12. Black and Puerto Rican parents removed their children from the program protesting their concern about their children's reading skill development. The school had to give up its volunteer basis for the program and assign children whose parents would not object in order to maintain a mixed 1/1/1 ratio in the classroom of whites, blacks and Puerto Ricans. A white parent moved to New Jersey, not due to concern about her children learning but due to concern about their safety. Both her son and her daughter came home bloody from fights frequently. She blamed the "permisiveness" of the open education program.

(5) Children had ideas about what the open education had meant to them. In 1976 children who I had known in the first grade and now in junior high school told me that open education was"for middle class kids,""for white kids," "for kids who were going to Music and Art (a selective high school within the public school system)," "its for kids whose mothers are in the p.t.a.," or "its for re-tards, dumb kids who only learn to cook and sew."

The economic crisis had removed material and personnel from the open education program and from the school as a whole so that personnel changed often, teachers supportive of the program had left the school, and fear for one's job dominated the thinking of teachers while fear for one's children dominated the thinking of parents.

There was a discrepancy between what the school thought it did and what it actually did. The ideas and goals of the program, the conditions under which it began in the 1960's and the people involved in its beginnings were different from the ideas, conditions and people remaining in the program as of 1976.

The school thought it has an open education program and had so integrated the idea of it into its system that when asking to be shown to the open education corridor in 1976,it was indicated briefly like any other classroom while in 1970 it had brought smiles and lengthy discussions. The thrill was gone, but unknown to them, so was the open education system. But the idea remains that the program still exists and therefore is on trial, falsely. Open education should not be measured by what goes on in these classrooms. The innovative system within the public school failed but like the Emperor, comported itself as if draped in the finery of a new garb. A system of unequal access to upward mobility is reproduced in the public school's innovative education which remain supported primarily by white middle class population. Middle class white children benefit from these classes because the children who finish their "real work" first are allowed to use the materials; the children who are reinforced in arts and crafts at home also practice them in school where they are reinforced by the teacher. This situation also reinforces the teacher by allowing her to think that a creative process is going on in her classroom. These relationships between the "good" children and the teacher are mutually reinforcing so that the teacher feels that she is part of a dynamic open education process. For the other children in the room it is a different matter. Children who do not obviously have abilities and skills are ignored, yelled at or punished. Teachers use discipline, coercion, and work books to get a certain amount of paper work from the children before they can roam around the room. The faster workers get more time in the open education environment; the slow students have little or no time.

In sum, the main causes for the defeat of the program are (1) support among adults diminished. The sociopolitical climate changed; youthful offenders in crime, drug use and alcoholism concerned adults who blamed these conditions on the "permissiveness" of the 1960's,with which open education was associated. Attitudes among minority parents became focused on their children learning rather than on integration; (2) continuing education for adults whose children are involved in the program has not existed. There is therefore no understanding, communication or unanimity of goals among the would-be supporters; (3)funds are not available; (4) resistance caused by attitudes of personnel involved in the program; (5) the atmosphere has changed from one of innovation and energy to one of crisis and competition; (6) basic attitudes of traditional education permeate open education classrooms; (7) a myth exists that the open education program is viable and that the school has positive attitudes toward change, integration and equal opportunity among all students; (8)people are in conflict with each other and with the goals of open education; (9) change requires structural change as well as ideology. _ - - - - - - - -

The private school,on the other hand,although not without its contradictions has survived for more than a dozen years. The school community is a network of people from four boroughs of New York,broadly ranging in class and ethnicity. Over the years, discussions and arguments among all the members led to changes, and present flexibility and openness to change are obvious. For example, in the beginning, no work books were allowed and then workbooks were

brought in to introduce children to forms they must familiarize themselves with in preparation for junior and senior high school. Problems are aired constantly and on a daily basis. There is an atmosphere of constant discussion on the best way to do things. All in all, the school is successful because (1) the basic value system that lies behind the educational goals are kept constantly in mind and on the shelves for ready reference. Although fine points are argued, the basic value system is not questioned; (2) this material is available to replenish the interest and education of new teachers and parents, allowing a continuum with previously involved adults and children; (3) the entire school community, with individual or occasional exceptions, has the same value system. That is to say that existing friction is below the schism level; (4) the school community is part of a counter-culture network that includes common ideology and methodology that unites the members of the network and gives them a sense of solidarity and furthers the adherence of the school to its open education goals; (5) the teachers work together as an autonomous group without conflicting goals of a larger institution; (6) the teachers and director are talented at school administration and open education methodology; (7) the concept of respect for the child and the child's freedom eliminates the possibility of an antagonistic child culture which might conflict with the goals of the adults; child culture is not a rebellious one as in authoritarian structures but is creative and relates dialectically with the adult culture; (8) the building itself was picked to effect the desired goals, allowing the physical freedom for the child, the decentralization of educational activities and the other goals of open education; (9) an open and non-bureaucratic structure which allows for positive change through discussion, suggestion and experimentation.

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My observations of open education values, attitudes and process suggest their archetypes in primitive socialization. The goals of open education and their fulfillment can be characterized descriptively as non-authoritarian, non-abstract, and concrete and existential. There is freedom for exploration and experiential learning. The child develops autonomy within a framework of rules and internalizes the values. Interdependency, trustfulness, respect and responsibility to others are inculcated. Personal, affective teaching with a flexible curriculum allows each child to learn creatively. Individual creativity and expressiveness, as well as group experience in music and dance are part of the program. The experience of the child is validated, sexuality is expressed and directed toward socially acceptable behavior which is integrated with other aspects of life.

These qualities are found in primitive socialization also: non-authoritarian, non-abstract, and concrete and existential. Primitive socialization also allows expressiveness, freedom for exploration and experiential learning. This freedom exists within a structure of definite values and norms which allows a child to develop independence, autonomy and an internalized system of values. The experience of the child is validated, and the physical, psychological, cognitive, and aesthetic urges of the child are expressed.

These qualities and others that describe primitive socialization values may be seen as archetypes of open education. Dorothy Lee has described the experiential and existential awareness inherent in primitive socialization.[1] She also discusses the interdependency of community and autonomy or what Diamond calls individuation.[2] Theorists on primitive life and ethnographers repeat these and other themes.[3] Presently, research is in progress concerning the subject of valuing the self. That is, the self-concept of children in open classroom settings is being compared to that of children in traditional classroom settings.[4]

The perception of primitive socialization values as archetypes of open education is not coincidental. Innovators have often looked to primitive literature for socialization concepts. Parents and teachers at the private school have read accounts of primitive socialization, including Mead, Malinowski and Reich. Many innovators have read the works of Neill, who was influenced by Reich and Malinowski. Most innovators have read or are aware of Freudian concepts, some of which are concerned with primitive themes.

This concern with primitive life as a paradigm for human existence and child socialization is interesting in itself but also allows us a context within which to comprehend and challenge contemporary civilization.

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Conclusions drawn from this investigation suggest that certain conditions in structure and in attitude are required for educational change.

Limitations concerning present conditions necessarily designate some requirements for preferred educational change as utopian. The following two points exemplify this.

Structural conditions required for effecting educational change include the collective endeavor of the neighborhood: parents, teachers, and administration, so that there is little conflict among these elements in their concepts, goals or action.

Secondly, the school must be autonomous from engulfing bureaucratic institutions including control of fiscal arrangements. The value of the cooperative endeavor of parents and teachers will be nullified by inadequate finances.

The third structural necessity is open communication between all parties for planning, executing, evaluating and replanning. This need not be formalized and possibly may operate better informally through known networks of people within the school. Complaints, criticisms, proposals and insights should pass up and down a network of parents, children and teachers.

Fourthly, well trained, coordinated and periodically refreshed teachers with specialities or areas of expertise, with clarity of theory and method are required.

Fifthly, the teacher-pupil ratio must be adequate. This requires funds, volunteer aids, or a collective that assures personnel no matter what the financial situation is.

In addition to structural requirements, ideological commitment and solidarity is necessary to assure the continuity of the community.

Because open education did not work in the public school, we do not know from this study whether open education can solve public school problems relating to racism and poverty, for example. We did learn certain other things about the public school system, however. The dominant mode of traditional schooling has driven out or absorbed the innovative mode of open education. The program was absorbed into the structure of the school. With no real change on the part of the school system, the desires of idealistic neighborhood parents and teachers had been allowed into the school system at a time of conflict between neighborhood people and the school system. It seemed in retrospect that the program had been allowed to exist without any intention on the part of the administration to aid its continued success. The metaphor of cooptation may be an appropriate description.

From the investigation on a comparitive basis, it seems that open education (1) socializes children in a special way, (2) is reflective of primitive modes, and (3) is a revitalization movement or counter-culture movement.

These assumptions can be discussed within a family-community vs. state theoretical construct. In this study it was the program of the family-community that was absorbed into the state system, that is the public school system, and it was the program of the family-community, established as far away as possible from state control and was able to achieve its goals.

The family-community and the state exist in a state of tension and the present study reiterates this. The dynamics of the struggle are well known in American legal history. This study reiterates the propositions that the more nearly free from state influences, the more likely an innovation can succeed, and that the need to be armed against the power of state institutions is mandatory when innovating within those institutions. Further studies concerning storefront schools, daycare and other community experiments including what changes occur with the acceptance of state funds might illuminate this theme. Do the requirements of the state education system interfere with the socialization requirements of the family-community? Does the family-community require cooperation, family loyalty and personal autonomy for its continued existence while the state requires authoritarian behavior, patriotism, and group-think for its continued existence? Is open education an attempt to revitalize holistic socialization within a family-community context?

This study reiterates other questions: what are the possibilities of change as a function of ideology? Can new ideology create new structures, values, cognitive or symbolic processes?

What kind of community or quasi-kin unity is required to resist domination by the existing structure? For isn't it the domination that prevents the children from growing?

Fred Inglis has said,

> School children have suffered the assaults of an alien speech and symbolism as an impersonal violence against which they have closed their shutters and remained in hiding until the noise outside went away.[5]

Footnotes

1. Lee, Dorothy, 1976, Valuing the Self, What We Can Learn From Other Cultures, Prentice Hall, New Jersey

2. Diamond, Stanley,1974, In Search of the Primitive, A Critique of Civilization, Transaction Books, New Brunswick, N.J.

3. Qualitative descriptions of primitive society can be found in Lee (1970), Radin (1957), Redfield (1969), Diamond (1974), Erny (1973), and others. Generalizations concerning aspects of child socialization that correlate to the type of society in terms of complexity have been described by Beatrice and John Whiting. Values of the society correspond to its complexity. For example, in different types of cultures, it was hypothesized that children are socialized to different attitudes such as seeking help, seeking dominance, offering help and suggesting responsibility. This material, as a preview of Beatrice and John Whiting's upcoming work was discussed by Barnow (1973).

   Ethnographical literature includes material on child socialization. For a bibliography, see John Middleton (1970). Many of these writers include the following type of information on socialization: (1) how the group feels about the child or children, (2) supernatural beliefs and ritual connected with the child, (3) general treatment of the child, (4) discipline, (5) toys, (6) method of learning adult roles--instrumental, imitative and specific education; (7) learning mores, values and attitudes, and (8) ceremonial initiation at puberty. This type of information is in contrast to studies such as those by Whiting and Whiting and others which use a model for perceiving and defining socialization aspects of a culture.

4. Sturmun, Lin, 1978, Queens College Master's Degree Thesis in progress.

5. Inglis, Fred, 1975, Ideology and the Imagination, Cambridge U. Press

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